Jaguar: You Can't Fight The Kitty

By Kevin Savetz

It really doesn't matter whether or not you like MacOS X, because — for better or for worse — it's here to stay. Beginning in January, all new Macs that Apple sells will only boot into OS X. They won't be able to boot directly into MacOS 9 (now affectionately known as "Classic").

Five minutes after Apple makes this change, enterprising hackers devoted to OS 9 will certainly devise a workaround, but it doesn't matter — its fate is sealed. OS X is the wave of the future. Although some people will complain about having OS X forced down their throats, it really is a much better operating system than the old Arabic-numbered MacOS.

The first version of OS X was strictly for early adopters: it was slow and buggy, and very little software supported its new features. A few months later, Apple released version 10.1, a free maintenance upgrade that fixed many of those issues. With 10.1, OS X became truly usable. In many ways, it was much more powerful than Classic MacOS, but it was lacking in other ways, missing features that OS 9 users were accustomed to.

The latest incarnation of OS X — version 10.2, also known as Jaguar — is, for many, the release that puts OS X officially on the map. Apple has cleaned up many of the lingering problems of earlier versions, added a ton of new features, and generally made OS X ready for prime time. Apple says there are more than 150 new features. Here are some of the biggies:

• An updated version of the built-in e-mail program includes a great spam filter, supports multiple in-boxes, and adds an integrated address book that's available to all your other programs.

• iChat is a program for sending instant messages. Compatible with the popular AOL Instant Messenger software, it lets you chat with America Online members even if you aren't one. There are free programs from other companies that do the same thing, but iChat has a sleekness the others lack.

Sherlock – Channels
Channels
Internet
Pictures
Stocks
Movies
Yellow Pages
eBay
Flights
Dictionary
Translation
AppleCare
Use your favorite search sites to find what you're looking for.
The online marketplace for buying and selling goods and services.
Find pictures of people, places, and things.
Find out when flights are scheduled to arrive.
Track the stocks in your portfolio and get the latest news about each one.
Look up the meaning of words and acronyms, and find related words.
Find when and where movies are playing in your area and watch the trailer.
Translate words and phrases between 6 or more languages.
Look for businesses in your area and get directions to get you there.
Look for Macintosh products or search the AppleCare KnowledgeBase for articles about Apple products.
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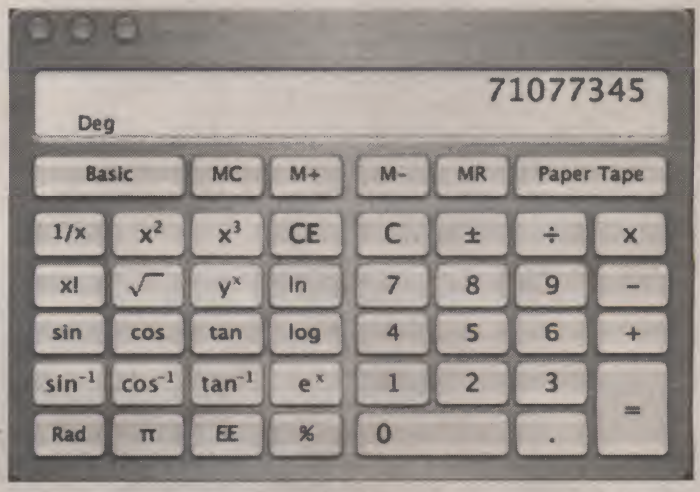
Sherlock is a convenient tool for grabbing information from the Internet without using a web browser.



Say goodbye to the boring four-function calculator of MacOS past — and say hello to Jaguar's calc.

• Jaguar adds features for disabled users, including screen magnification, the ability to have text read aloud, and features for folks who can't easily use a keyboard.

• Sherlock 3 lets you get all sorts of information — maps, dictionary definitions, stock news, yellow pages listings, and so on — from the Internet without using your Web browser.

• Spring-loaded folders, a useful navigation feature from MacOS Classic, are back. The Finder has lots of other little tweaks, too: it makes it easier than ever to search for files, and is faster than previous versions of MacOS X (but not as fast as OS 9.)

• The personal firewall feature keeps your Mac safer from crackers when you're online — especially useful for people with cable modems or DSL connections.

• Several new networking features make working with other computers and peripherals easier. Rendezvous is a behind-the-scenes technology that lets your Mac talk to other gadgets (such as printers and other computers) on a network without fussing with configuration. You can also share files with Windows PCs on a local area network. Sweet stuff if you have more than one computer in your home or office.

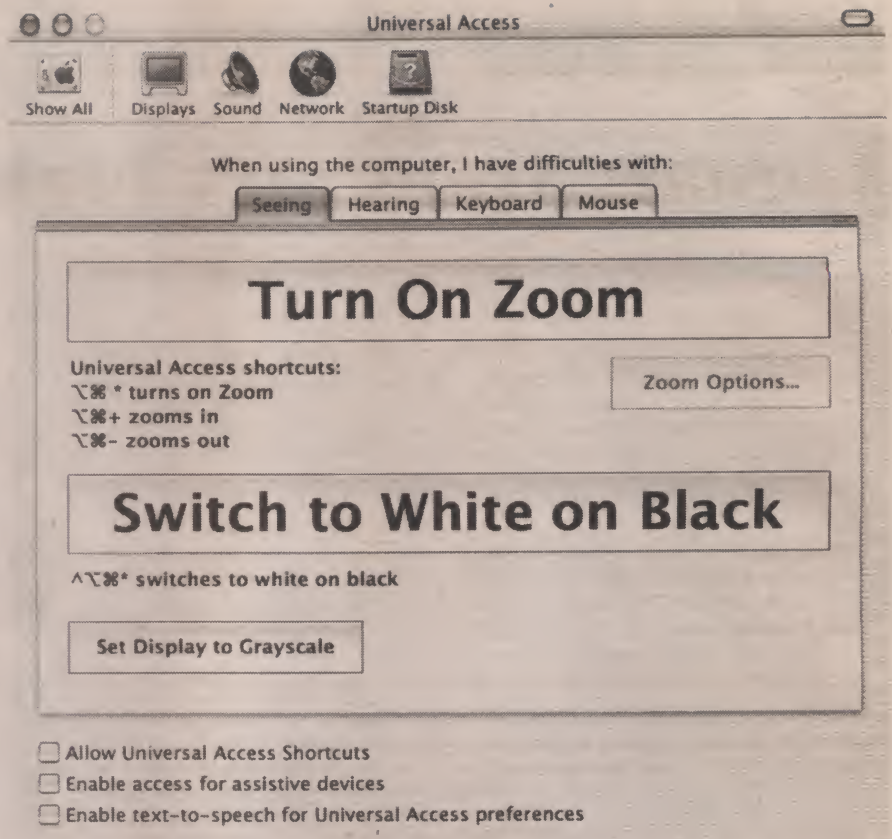
• Quartz Extreme speeds up graphics processing if you have a snazzy newer Mac with the right type of video card. Unfortunately, my older 400 MHz PowerMac G4 isn't so blessed.

• Apple doesn't even mention it, but I love Jaguar's spiffy new calculator. Hey, you gotta enjoy the little things in life...

Jaguar isn't perfect: since I upgraded from 10.1 to Jaguar, Microsoft Word took on the unseemly habit of crashing at random intervals. Users at Macintouch.com (a great Mac news site) have complained of a smattering of other problems, such as networking difficulties and problems with fonts. No operating system is prefect, and despite its advances, there's room for improvement in Jaguar.

Despite little glitches, Jaguar is rock solid. In the months I've been running various versions of OS X, my Mac has crashed only once. Zero times since upgrading to Jaguar. When an application crashes, which can happen from time to time, you can just restart it and keep on working. With MacOS 9 and earlier, a crashed application usually meant that you had to reboot the Mac.

My biggest issue with Jaguar is the price. The retail price is $129, and although street prices are as low as



Jaguar includes special features for users who have difficulty seeing, hearing, typing, and using the mouse.

$100, there are no free upgrades, there is no reduced price for those of us who are moving up from earlier editions of OS X. Apple wants you to pay full price to upgrade, take it or leave it — an attitude that is hard for some of OS X's early adopters to swallow. (There's no word from Apple whether the next version, dubbed Panther and due to be released sometime in 2003, will have a similar upgrade policy.)

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Should You Upgrade?

Should you upgrade your current Mac to Jaguar? If you're running an earlier version of OS X, the answer is yes. The gaggle of new features — quicker file searching, spring-loaded folders, improved mail, iChat, and so on — are worth it.

If you're still using OS 9 or earlier, the decision to upgrade isn't so cut-and-dried. If you are happy with the current state of affairs, I suggest leaving well enough alone. Upgrading the OS also means updating your applications and other time-consuming hassles. For now, at least, you have the luxury of choice. The next time you buy a new Mac, you won't.

On the other hand, if you're feeling frustrated by the limitations of Classic Mac OS (notably, it doesn't use Unix, and can't run spiffy OS X-only software like iCal and iPhoto and even programs that don't start with the letter i), I suggest upgrading. That is, if your computer has enough RAM. Officially, Jaguar will work on any iMac, iBook, PowerMac G3 or G4 with more than 128MB RAM. But I wouldn't want to use OS X on any machine with that little RAM – 256 MB is the realistic minimum for a speedy good time.